




Speech By
Aaron Harper

MEMBER FOR THURINGOWA

Record of Proceedings, 21 February 2023

MATTERS OF PUBLIC INTEREST

Thuringowa Electorate

 **Mr HARPER** (Thuringowa—ALP) (2.55 pm): I am pleased to share with the House that we recently hosted the Premier in Townsville once again for the Australia Day flag raising ceremony. Our Premier made a commitment in 2015 to come back each year to North Queensland. I take this opportunity to acknowledge the many defence personnel who make that flag raising event such a success for our community. The Governor of Queensland attended as well. This event brings together members of our proud community and our defence personnel who perform an outstanding parade concluding with a 21-gun salute from our Strand headlands at Jezzine Barracks. I particularly enjoy this annual occasion as it is just another opportunity, as the local member for Thuringowa, to join the Premier to announce the 2020 election commitments and perhaps even get a further commitment for my electorate as well.

I joined the Premier at the site of the 1300SMILES stadium which is all but gone with the extensive demolition due to conclude soon. Then we visited the Kirwan Health Campus for another health announcement. I am pleased the police minister is in the House today because he knows that in 2020 our government made an election commitment of \$30 million—and I thank the minister—towards the new Kirwan police station to be located at the former site of the Cowboys' home stadium. Thanks to the minister and the Premier it is now closer to \$100 million as the Premier announced the site will be home to the brand new Police Academy as well. The old academy is well past its due date. It is almost 50 years old. Our hardworking police deserve new facilities. We are very proud of our North Queensland police facility, one that the LNP wanted to sell. This new site will bring together other units of the Queensland Police Service including the Rapid Action Patrol hub, Tactical Crime Unit, Policelink, of course the Police Academy and the hardworking officers of Kirwan station to their new home. Essentially, we will have hundreds of police located in Kirwan in the electorate of Thuringowa making our community safer.

I commend Acting Deputy Commissioner Mark Wheeler and his entire senior leadership team for their recent high-visibility activities in our city. Last year I made direct representations to the Minister for Police to do a pre-emptive police operation to counter crime in my community and that resulted in Operation Uniform Theta. It resulted in hundreds of arrests and charges in Thuringowa. Specifically, at a local level I approached the OIC of Kirwan to increase the police presence and patrols at the Willows Shopping Centre over the Christmas break. The feedback I received directly from constituents and business owners was that there was an increased feeling of safety. We had the new mobile police beat—another asset delivered to our community, thank you, Minister—due to that high activity over the Christmas school holidays. I take this opportunity to congratulate the new officer in charge of Kirwan station, Matt Lyons, who has the welfare of his officers as one of his highest priorities. I will also ensure through my representations to the minister that the staff have input into the design of the new police facility. I know Matt well. He was a former leader of the Townsville Stronger Communities Action Group.

This commitment builds upon my track record of delivering new facilities in Thuringowa for police and emergency services. In 2018 we opened the Upper Ross police facility, boosting staff numbers up there to 10. We have delivered more police in Kirwan. This is in stark contrast to the LNP who sacked police in Townsville, cut their operating budget and lowered police numbers under the former Newman LNP government of which the opposition leader was a member before, of course, he cut and ran to the Gold Coast. We back our police; we do not sack our police.

All ageing infrastructure has an end of life—there are a couple on the other side I could probably refer to—and the current police academy at Rowes Bay has dutifully served its purpose. It is now time to deliver a brand new facility for our hardworking Queensland police officers, one that is fit for purpose, to continue the proud tradition of training new recruits in our North Queensland academy. Many of those officers will set their careers in communities throughout Northern Queensland.

Of course, the North Queensland Cowboys have a great interest in the site as it is their former home. The initial designs for where the parade ground will be, which we saw displayed when the Premier made the announcement, give a nod to the old site. I am working very closely with the CEO of the North Queensland Cowboys, Jeff Reibel, to see if we can get some community consultation happening around naming, perhaps involving the names of former coaches and players. It is going to be a great facility. We back police in Townsville and I will continue to fight for more in Thuringowa.